

Every Precaution Taken Against Accident at Oliver Quarries

THREE MEN LOST LIVES LAST WEEK Inspector of Mines Found Everything in Order On Premises

“That Samuel Oliver, Solomon Earle and Nathan Woods came to their death at Owen Sound, on Wednesday, October 29, 1924, as the result of a premature explosion of dynamite at the Oliver Rogers quarry, and no blame should be attached to anyone.”

This article is as it appeared in the *Owen Sound Daily Sun Times*, November 5, 1924. Republished with kind permission of the *Owen Sound Sun Times*.

The above was the verdict rendered by the Coroner’s jury which was impanelled by Dr. Dow to inquire into the circumstances surrounding the death of Samuel Oliver, the owner, and Solomon Earle and Nathan Woods, jun., who were killed on Wednesday of last week when there was a premature explosion while one of the holes was being loaded preparatory to the blasting of a large quantity of rock.

The inquest was not a lengthy affair, only six witnesses being examined, and not one of them could throw any light whatever on the cause of the unfortunate affair. The evidence proved conclusively that every precaution was taken in the loading of the holes, that none of the men were smoking, that there were no wires attached to the battery which is used for the purpose of setting off the blast, and no one could offer an explanation, so that it will always remain a mystery.

Mr. T. F. Sutherland, Chief Mining Inspector of the Department of Mines of the Ontario Government, who visited the scene of the accident the day after it occurred, was present and questioned one or two of the witnesses, but he found that everything was regular and in order, that the law had been complied with in every particular, but brought out the fact that possibly some old dynamite which had been stock for some time might have been the cause, as there was some still in stock which showed that some of the nitro-glycerine had seeped toward the bottom, thus making it more dangerous for use. There was no evidence, however, that any of this had been used.

Coroner Dr. Dow presided and County Crown Attorney Dyre examined the witnesses. After the evidence had all been given it did not take the jury long to reach their verdict, which was a very simple one. The members of the jury were Messrs. Keith Webster, Ed

Caskell, S. H. Langford, G. E. Thorne, John Hart, A. J. Corbet, John Vanstone, Robert Gibson, Wm. McCallum and G. Ross Fraser.

Wm. Carnahan

Wm. Carnahan, foreman at the quarries, was the first witness examined. He told of the situation of the quarries, which occupied some 50 acres on the west side of 9th Avenue east; explained the formation of rock, which was used principally for building purposes. He stated that the method adopted to get out the rock was to scrape off the earth, drill with steam drills to a depth of about 20 feet and then blast. The holes are sometimes about 4 inches, especially in the case of the use of the well drills. The holes from which this explosion occurred were drilled with a well driller and were about 22 feet deep. After the holes are drilled they are pumped out, and loaded with dynamite, the sticks being 8 inches long, and 4 inches in diameter. They never had one stick but used a stick sometimes to see that they are at the bottom. He did not know who used the pole on this occasion. Finally one went in the hole with a cap on and others are put on top of that and then the rest is filled with loose gravel. There is a fuse wire attached to the stick with the cap on and this comes out of the top of the hole and leads to the battery. There were four holes filled on this occasion. There was no tamping done until the holes are almost full. If there are more holes than one, the wires are connected to the battery 40 or 50 feet away, two wires running to it. He had worked there 18 years and this was the first accident and the same method had been in use in that time. The number of men employed during the summer was between 40 and 50. It usually took three men to load one of the holes. They had not used any iron rods for tamping in a great many years, the wooden poles being preferred. There were five holes loaded, but only two went off prematurely. The other three were put off during the afternoon. Solomon Earle had worked there for several years and had done a great deal of blasting but Woods had not done any before. Mr. Oliver was in charge at the time. He had been engaged in quarry work for 30 years. [The] [w]itness said he was 300 feet away from the scene when the accident occurred. He saw the three men at the holes just a few minutes before that. He had no theory as to the cause of the accident but was sure that the wires were not attached to the battery. As the result of the explosion, the three men were killed. The holes were about 10 feet apart.

To Inspector Sutherland, [the] witness stated that when Mr. Oliver was not in charge, he himself looked after the work. Earle had been selected because of his experience and the battery was at a safe distance and not connected. He was also sure that the holes were not hot. He found the tamping rod after the accident and it was broken at both ends indicating that it had been in use at the time. Earle was not a smoker and Mr. Oliver only occasionally and never at his work. Woods smoked a cigarette occasionally. The cartridge was never broken open, so that there could not be any loose dynamite around the holes. The detonator was sometimes put in at the side and sometimes at the end. He considered Mr. Oliver a very careful man at his work. One of the sticks which was left had been pierced for the detonator and was in good shape. Several brands of dynamite were on hand. Dates were given on which these dynamite boxes were packed and some were dated 1920 and some 1921. An order had been received this spring. Witness tasted one of the sticks and got an acid taste. He could not explain why this old dynamite had

not been used before and could give no reason why Mr. Oliver was using this old stuff on this day unless to get rid of the old stuff.

Judson Carnahan

Judson Carnahan had been employed at the quarry for three or four months previous to the accident. He was at the steam shovel in the bottom of the quarry at the time and had his back turned. He saw the three men at the hole and they were loading at the time. He had crossed over the holes on his way to the shovel and saw Mr. Oliver put in a stick and heard him remark that that was five sticks in the hole. He saw one wire leading to the holes and there was no connection. Witness was sure no one was smoking at the time. He was sure that the tamping pole was wooden.

Matt Aitken

Matt Aitken was employed in looking after the crushing plant. He saw the men finish up the fourth hole and himself got in the sand on the top and tamped it down and then went on to his work. The others went over to the fifth hole and started work. It was after he got to work he heard the explosion. Witness was sure there was no connection with the battery.

Samuel Ward

Samuel Ward had been employed at the quarry for some time and was familiar with the method of loading the holes but did not see the explosion and knew nothing about it.

Samuel Harrison

Samuel Harrison worked off and on at the quarries for 15 or 16 years. He was 300 feet from the scene of the accident and was sitting down looking at the men loading the holes.

Jas. McGarry

Jas. McGarry at the time of the accident was working oiling the boom at the steam shovel. It was 25 feet away from the place of accident. He saw the three men working at the hole and figured that he could hardly turn round after oiling the boom when the accident occurred. Mr. Oliver was on his right knee with a stick of dynamite in his hand and the other two had hold of the tamping stick when he saw them last. He had no theory as to the cause of the accident.

This completed the taking of evidence and Mr. Dyre very briefly reviewed it, stating that there was apparently no negligence. Mr. Oliver had been 30 years engaged in this work and had been very careful in his work. It just looked like a very sad and unfortunate and regrettable accident.

Samuel Oliver, Quarry Owner, And Two Helpers, Earle And Woods, Killed by Explosion

**Woods Was Believed Dead, but Showed Signs of Life-- Remained
Alive Until Four O'clock--The Other Two Were Instantly Killed**

**BODIES OF VICTIMS WERE BLOWN TWENTY-FIVE FEET IN
THE QUARRY**

**Exact Cause of the Accident Will Not Be Known
--Three Were Engaged in Preparing a Charge of Dynamite for
Explosion This Afternoon**

THE DEAD

**SAMUEL OLIVER, quarry owner and operator, about 60 years of age,
841 4th Avenue East, City.**

**NATHAN WOODS, laborer, about 18 years of age, 1797 8th Avenue
East, City.**

**SOLOMON EARLE, laborer, about 53 years of age, 1797 8th Avenue
East, City.**

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Samuel Oliver, 841 4th Avenue East, one of the owners, and an employee, Solomon Earle, about 53 years old, were instantly killed, and Nathan Woods, jun. died at 4 o'clock as a result of an explosion at the Oliver-Rogers stone quarries on 9th Avenue East at one o'clock Wednesday afternoon. The first two mentioned were killed outright and Woods was thought to be dead but later showed signs of life. The cause was a premature

explosion in two holes while blasting out the quarries. The men were engaged in tamping the sticks of dynamite into the holes when the terrific explosion occurred. Three other men, James McGarry, Judson Carnahan and Sam Harris, who were in the near vicinity of the accident escaped unhurt.

[transcriber's note: what follows is obscured on the microfilm]

Solomon Earle, who resided at 1797 8th Avenue East, was also a native of Holland Township but has resided in the city for a long time and was one of the steady employees at the quarries where he was highly regarded as one of the best workers in the place. He leaves a wife and a family of 11 children, as follows: Mrs. Clifford Johnston; Mrs. Russell Green; Mrs. M. Scott, all of Owen Sound: Mrs. [Chonita] Martin, Toronto; Miss Rachael of Toronto; Mrs. Jas Hall of Mobert; Moses, Eddie, Beatrice, Stella and Shenita at home. The funeral will take place Saturday afternoon.

There was no more familiar figure in Owen Sound than the late Samuel Oliver, as he was considered to be one of the most astute businessmen of the city. He had been engaged in the quarrying business for a long period of years, and had been most successful. He first started in a small way on 7th Avenue East, and soon after starting he took in Mr. K. Webster as a partner, and he remained with him until about 10 years ago, when he retired. During this partnership the business increased to such an extent that considerable additional property was acquired [illegible] at the present time the quarries and adjoining land occupy a space of 60 acres just off 9th Avenue East. After the retirement of Mr. Webster a joint stock company was formed, and Mr. Frank Rogers, of Toronto, came into the business, although Mr. Oliver always retained the controlling amount of stock. Quite a number of other people are holders of stock in the company at the present time. They continue to do a thriving business and there is still a constant demand for the stone from these quarries which is shipped to all parts of the country.

In addition to his wife and little daughter, who are heartbroken over the death of a devoted husband and loving father, the late Mr. Oliver leaves to mourn his loss several sisters, among whom are Mrs. Robert Duncan; Mrs. Robert Alexander; Mrs. P. O. McCallum; Mrs. P. McCallum; Mrs. Lapan; Mrs. Adam Brown, and Miss Oliver. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church and belongs to the Independent Order of [Foresters].

Dr. Dow, Coroner, who took charge of the remains after the accident, later ordered an inquest to be done in order that all the circumstances in connection with the catastrophe might be cleared up, and a jury composed of Messrs. Keith Wester, Ed Gaskell, S. H. Langford, G. E. Thorne, John Hart, A. J. Corbet, John Vanstone, Robert Gibson, Wm. McCallum and G. Ross Fraser, was empanelled. They were given a view of the remains of the deceased after which an adjournment was taken until Wednesday evening, November 5th at 7:30 o'clock.

Terribly Hurt, Youngest Victim Lived Three Hours After Premature Blast

Remains of Woods Taken to Undertaker's; Was Still Alive

PASSED AWAY AT FOUR O'CLOCK

Owen Sound Mourns Death of Samuel Oliver and Workmen

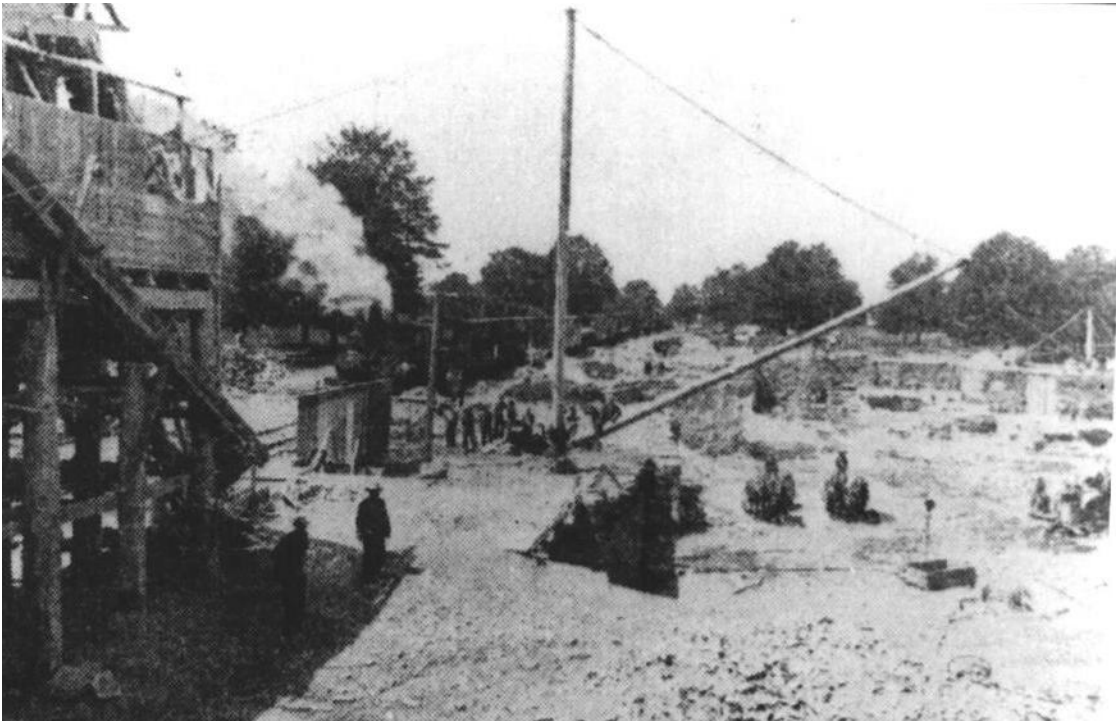
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Further details in connection with the terrible tragedy of Wednesday at the Oliver-Rogers quarries in which three persons lives were lost, Samuel Oliver, one of the owners, Solomon Earle and Nathan Woods, jun..., employees ... And when it is known that there were at least two other charges in the rock in close proximity to those were prematurely exploded, the danger in which the other men who were employed there at the time can be realised. The wonder is that with such a terrible detonation the others did not discharge. However, soon after the bodies of the unfortunate victims had been removed the foreman, Judson Carnahan, saw to it that the others were discharged in the usual way and thus all chances of further disaster were removed.

During the afternoon, the scene of the occurrence was visited by a large number of citizens but there was not a great deal to be seen with the exception of the large quantity of rock which had been blown out of the side of the quarry by the force of the explosion and the three pools of blood indicating where the bodies of the three men had been thrown by the force of the discharge.

One of the most remarkable things in connection with the accident was the length of time that young Woods remained alive. It was thought that he was dead when he was placed in the ambulance and he was actually taken to one of the undertakers, but the undertaker noticed at once the man was still breathing and he was taken away, and it was exactly 4 o'clock when he breathed his last. He exhibited tremendous vitality, and those who saw his condition would hardly believe that he still lived. [His] father and mother [were] at his side when he passed away and although he did not seem conscious even to the slightest degree, there was the satisfaction of seeing their son before (he died).

[transcriber's note: the article continues, but is illegible on the microfilm]



Oliver-Rogers quarry – Grey Roots Archival Collection 1982.073.003